

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING...

... eArNe(ARTI)ST¹

How do they do it ?

« To all appearances, the artist acts like a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing.

If we give the attributes of a medium to the artist, we must then deny him the state of consciousness on the esthetic plane about what he is doing or why he is doing it. All his decisions in the artistic execution of the work rest with pure intuition and cannot be translated into a self-analysis, spoken or written, or even thought out. »²

INTUITION

Who said that ? Marcel Duchamp in 1957, at the venerable age of 70. This could allow us to think that, in his youth, in 1913, this man, who is considered as the trailblazer of *conceptual art*, did not « think out » his first *ready-made*, that it was neither the result of a reasoning nor did it come from a deliberate decision, but perhaps occurred simply as a wonder at the sight of flashing-by bicycle wheel spokes, in the same way one is amazed by watching a fire burning in the hearth. The bicycle was then a quite recent invention, liable to excite one's curiosity – the first « Tour de France » took place in 1903 ! It could be compared to how computers and internet have spread all over our everyday life for the last fifteen years : each of us writes and reads lots of e-mails everyday and everyone makes digital photographs, at least with one's telephone. As well as people were amazed in the 1900s by the appearance of bicycles, automobiles and airplanes the movement of which upset their perception of the world, a century later, we are fascinated today by the prodigious feats performed by computers but we only use their applications ; most of us do not know how to program them. According to Duchamp as to many artists, creation does not result from rational intelligence. It comes from intuition. One could even say that creation is only possible if it bypasses intelligence.

In 1904, Marcel Proust wrote : « Every day, I pay less price to intelligence. »³ For him, it is only « sensation » and not intelligence that can lead to knowledge, to truth. Everybody knows the famous « episode of the *madeleine* », in which the taste of the biscuit activates an involuntary memory. And oddly enough, it is the most intimate sensations (gustatory and tactile almost, auditive, a little) which permit this « resurrection » ; never those more controlled, more rational, more « intelligent » perhaps, like eyesight. And yet philosopher Gilles Deleuze says that « The work of Proust competes with philosophy. »⁴ Should then knowledge be found in the vagueness of experienced life, rather than in the clarity of thought ? Would the search rather be a matter of intuition than of logic ? This gives an echo to Proust's contemporary, philosopher Henri Bergson :

¹ A tribute to Oscar Wilde.

² Marcel Duchamp, « Le processus créatif », *Duchamp du signe*, Paris, Flammarion, « Champs », 1994, p. 188-189. This is a talk held in english by M. D. in Houston (Texas) in April 1957, at the American Federation of Arts conference. He did the french translation himself.

³ Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte Beuve*, preceded by *Pastiches et mélanges* and followed by *Essais et articles*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. La Pléiade, 1971, p. 211-218 (translation by the author).

⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust et les signes*, Paris, PUF, « À la pensée », 1971, p. 186 (t. b. a.).

« Human intelligence only feels at home as long as one leaves her among inert objects, and more especially among solids, [...] our concepts have been shaped in the image of the solids, our logic is almost the logic of the solids, [...] and therefore our intelligence is triumphant in geometry, [...] our thought with its merely logical form is unable to represent the genuine nature of life⁵ »

To that he opposes the liquid, « the wave of the being », its « undulation » that is only led by instinct. But instinct is mute, he says :

« If consciousness dozing inside could wake up, if it were interiorized in knowledge instead of exteriorized in action, if we could question it and if it could answer, it would deliver us the most intimate secrets of life. »⁶

Faculty that can offset to this mute instinct is, for Bergson, intuition : « It represents attention the spirit pays to itself, by addition, while it is focussed on the matter, on its object. »⁷. In other words, it is a way of exceeding the duality of subject and object by simultaneously including them in the field of knowledge. But is it not such a point of view on oneself that fundamentally characterizes the living ? This polarization which constitutes one as a subject - rudimentary in the protozoon and which becomes consciousness in the human being, « leading product of the universe », as physicist and philosopher Pierre Malifaud says.⁸ ? And this does not only concern creation in art but any human activity, whatever it is, from driving an automobile to researching in sciences. Mathematician Henri Poincaré was saying in 1903 :

« Logic is not enough, [...] science of demonstration is not the whole science and [...] intuition must preserve its role as a complement, I was going to say as a counterweight or a counterpoison to logic. [...] if it is useful to the student, and still much more to the creative scientist. »⁹.

This form of pre-rational intelligence, this kind of sensitive way of thinking is particularly obvious in an artistic experience and there is a strange paradox between the difficulty for the artists to explain why they do something rather than something else, while doing it, sometimes even claiming for the unutterability of their creation, and, on the other hand, the kind of confidence in which they seem to be acting most of the time. As if they knew the reason why. Therefore the american painter Mark Rothko did answer someone he was talking to in the fifties :

« Intuition is the height of rationality. Not opposed. Intuition is the opposite of formulation. Of dead knowledge¹⁰. »

⁵ Henri Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice* (1907), *Œuvres*, Paris, PUF, 1970, p.489 (t. b. a.).

⁶ *Ibid.*, *L'évolution créatrice*, p. 635 (t. b. a.).

⁷ *Ibid.*, *La pensée et le mouvant*, pp. 1319-20 (t. b. a.).

⁸ Pierre Malifaud et Ivan Toulouse, *Décoder le Réel, dialogue*, foreword by Claude Hagège, Paris, L'Harmattan, « Eurêka & Cie », 2012, p. 121.

⁹ Henri Poincaré, *La valeur de la science* (1905), Paris, Flammarion, 2003. (t. b. a.). Has to be read as well the book of Jacques Hadamard, *An Essay on the Psychology of Invention in the Mathematical field*, Princeton University Press (1945), New-York, Dover publications (1954), Oxford University Press (1955). The pun on the french words « contrepoids » and « countrepoison » cannot be translated but must be underlined.

¹⁰ Mark Rothko, *Ecrits sur l'art 1934-1969*, Paris, Flammarion, 2005, p. 132. This conversation took place in 1952.

Afterwards things happen to be obvious and logical and a few decades later the most independent artist or even the most rebel one appears to be the « witness of his time », as the very representative example of the society he (she) him (her-)self thought he (she) was even fighting against. As the word says it, a « *retro-spective* » exhibits the work of an artist as it would be seen in a rearview mirror (« *rétro-viseur* » in french), that is to say from the end towards the beginning. But when the artist was doing his (her) work, he (she) was not viewing it in that way ! He (she) was just doing something pragmatically, not knowing really why, and could have chosen another possibility instead of that very one. It is the same with great inventions : it seems stupidly obvious that you shall get water when turning your tap ! Yet it had to be invented.

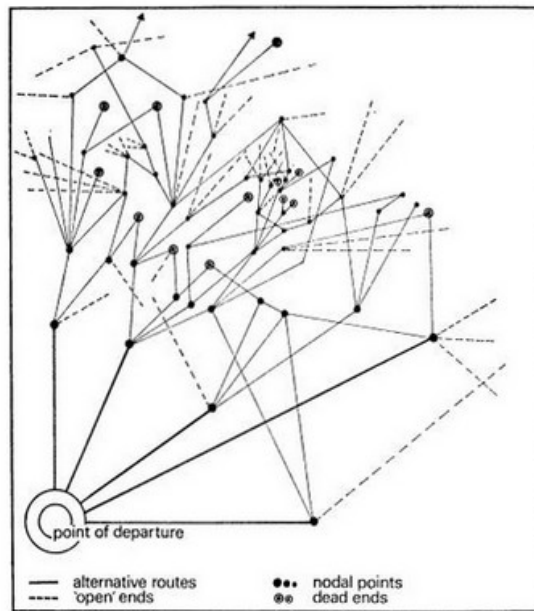
The explanation of this apparent contradiction is presumably to be found in an operating process psychologist Anton Ehrenzweig describes as « unconscious scanning »: the creator would find his way about in the labyrinth by instinct, « as if » he had a bird's-eye view on it or a cartography of the possible routes, allowing him to engage in fertile tracks rather than in dead ends.

CREATION AS A TREE

The creating process could then be represented as a tree. At each time, the artist is facing a choice among several branches, then, after a while, facing a new indetermination and new choice, and again and again... On the other side, the curator who organizes a retrospective has had an interest on Picasso's child drawing, for instance, because the painter was well-known afterwards. Otherwise nobody would have ever paid any attention to them. Viewing the work from the end is like the Ariadne's thread. It can lead Theseus back to the entrance after having killed the Minotaur, and then escape the Labyrinth. There is no longer any decision to be made between two or three possible routes. You just have to follow down the main way, back to the trunk, back to the beginning. That does disconnect all the tensions of what was an undetermined process, and that makes it look as simple and obvious as a rectilinear route, as soon as the chronological order has been restored. Thus the visitor of the *Musée Picasso*, in Paris, finds it totally logical that the artist had been passing through these different periods (fauve, rose, blue) before entering cubism... and nobody even worries about the fact that around 1917 he still paints cubist canvasses in the same time as a neoclassical portrait of his wife Olga sitting in an armchair.

It is like an outward journey compared to the return : if I want to reach a remote little village in the country, for instance, I will probably drive the wrong way and « recalculate » my route quite often, if not get lost twice or more, whereas, for the return, I just have to follow the signposts « Paris » from the start and I shall be home soon without any trouble. The artist is on the way in and the onlooker (or the curator) on the way back. Another comparison could be held with a fish-trap, despite the fact that chronology is inverted : it is much easier for the unfortunate fish to get into it than to get out of it. The creator would be the fish succeeding in showing the way out of the trap.

To give a modelization of « the maze (serial structure) of a creative search. », as the artist experiences it, Anton Ehrenzweig proposes a very demonstrative diagram :



« The creative thinker has to advance on a broad front keeping open many options. He must gain a comprehensive view of the entire structure of the way ahead without being able to focus on any single possibility».¹¹

The creative process would require considering a massive amount of possibilities from « nodal points » who mark out the course. And each one of these choices has a crucial importance has on the later development of the work. And yet the artist has no aerial overview of this network. Neither, has he got a map of it. As Ehrenzweig says :

«If we could map out the entire way ahead, no further search would be needed. As it is, the creative thinker has to make a decision about his route without having the full information needed for his choice. This dilemma belongs to the essence of creativity.»¹²

In other words, the linear retrospective and explanatory view has very little to see with what the artist's self-experience is, in terms of intensity.

« UNCONSCIOUS SCANNING »

To begin with, it was as a psychologist-clinician that Ehrenzweig did inquire about art as an object of study, to attempt to reconsider the concept of « primary process ». For him, one could not give an account of art if primary processes were chaotic as the classical theory puts it. Conversely as much disputable he finds the *Gestalt* psychology, that would divide the field of vision between signifying figure and meaningless background for instance. This seemed to him contradictory with

¹¹ Anton Ehrenzweig, *The hidden order of art*, (1967), University of California Press. [ISBN 9780520038455](https://doi.org/10.1017/9780520038455). All references are given from french translation : *L'ordre caché de l'art*, (pref. J.F. Lyotard), Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Tel », 1991, (p. 70 et sq).

¹² *Ibid.* p. 71.

This is what Marguerite Duras was saying about writing as well : « If one knew something about what one is going to write, before doing it, before writing, one would never write. It would be useless. To write is to try to know what one would write if one were writing » *Écrire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1993 (t. b. a.).

syncretism that prevails in the artist vision. The appearance of disorder masks a « hidden order of art » which he tries to highlight, in the same way that Freud had showed, in his *Traumdeutung*, how the latent content of a dream can be interpreted from its manifest content, which apparently is often absurd, by taking account of the phenomena of displacement and condensation in particular.

Not being able to consider, one after another, all the much too numerous possibilities, the artist can only rely on a kind of vague intuition which is going to guide him to an interesting solution – and that is presumably what characterizes an artist. This is what Ehrenzweig calls « unconscious scanning ». This could be illustrated by this quote of Picasso, commenting to photographer Brassai his famous *Tête de taureau*, made merely by assembling a bike saddle and handlebars, melted out of bronze :

« The idea of this *Head of a Bull* occurred to me without me thinking it out... I did nothing but weld them together... What is marvellous in bronze is that it can give to the most heteroclite objects such a unity that it is difficult to identify the elements from which it is made up. But it is a danger too ; if one would only see the head of a bull and no longer the handlebar and the saddle which have formed it, this sculpture would lose much of its interest »¹³



An « idea » that occurs « without one thinking it out ». This oxymoron characterizes the « unthought » of creation process. It is not a matter of logical deduction, of decision, the implications of which one has measured. No ! It is an unreasoned dash. However, a later analysis will be able to highlight the intuitive logic of the lucky find : the handlebar is the instrument for the direction, and the saddle is the seat of the command. Associating those two elements is relevant to express the « head » of the bicycle and the head of a bull or of a Minotaur, mythical figure of power. In comparison, assembling chain, pedals or rack, which are the subdued parts of the bike, would make no sense. At the same time most simple and highly complex, this sculpture seems to me the paradigm of a piece of art, because the artistic gesture is reduced to its very least : no physical commitment, no material transformation, no use of any techniques... and yet the criteria of creation are fulfilled.¹⁴ Art is here merely typified as creative energy. According to René Passeron, the three criteria of creation are : 1) the production is not mainly directed towards a functional goal, 2) it has a symbolic range as if it were a pseudo-person and 3) and its author is emotionally involved in it.

¹³ Brassai, *Conversations avec Picasso*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Idées », 1969, p. 76 (t. b. a.).

¹⁴ René Passeron, « Pour une approche poïétique de la création » in *Les Enjeux*, t. 1, Paris, Encyclopaedia Universalis, 1993, p. 433 et sq. In this article is very clearly explained this approach of creation that Passeron (after Paul Valéry) calls « poïetics ».

Let us note, by the way, as Picasso himself says it, that the disparity of materials is reunified here by bronze : each element is decontextualized from a former structure – the bicycle, where it has its function from which is only preserved an essential signification –, then recontextualized into a new organism – a sculpture – which takes its autonomy. The use of bronze is here a paradigm of how such an *assemblage* of various objects or materials into a piece of art, typifies the passage from metaphor to metamorphosis. The choice operated by the artist is not conscious. He is not though just a plaything for chance, but he obeys a kind of « elective affinities ». Generally speaking, creation is not led by an open-air intention but by an underground determination. So says Picasso again :

«If you give certain things a meaning in my paintings, it might be very true, but I never had thought of it. The ideas and conclusions you draw, I came to them too, but instinctively, uncsciously. I paint things for what they are. It is in my subconscious mind. »¹⁵

On the opposite of conscious focussing, uncscious scanning is the ability to move in a kind of « disrupted » consciousness, in « dispersal », in « undifferentiation ». Of course, it is not a permanent state. There is something like an alternation between moments of focusing and breaking up, of converging and diverging. But the artistic work presumes this ability to switch, to disconnect, to empty out oneself, to let go... which has something to do with the myth of the visionary or prophetic artist. And, as seen above for science as well, it is not the concern of artists only.

« The scientist has to face the fragmentation of physical facts with courage. He has to scan a multitude of possible links that could make sense out of apparent chaos. I would maintain that he needs the more dispersed (undifferentiated) structure of low-level vision in order to project the missing order into reality. [...]. The artist, too, has to face chaos in his work before uncscious scanning brings about the integration of his work as well as of his own personality.»¹⁶

Quite often random appearance in some ways of processing is not only misleading but the creator himself is conscious that it has nothing to do with chance ; thus the drippings of Jackson Pollock, for instance. Having emigrated during the war, french surrealist painter André Masson introduced young New Yorkean artists to the « automatic writing » of his poets friends he had transposed to drawing and painting, and Pollock brought it up to a larger scale. Being asked if it was not more difficult to control his dripping than a brush, Pollock, seeking his words, answered :

« With experience it seems to be possible to control the flow of paint, to a great extent, and I don't use – I don't use the accident – 'cause I deny the accident... it's quite different from working, say, from a still life where you set up objects and work directly from them. I do have a general notion of what I'm about and what the results will be. I approach painting in the same sense as one approaches drawing, that is, it's direct. »¹⁷

¹⁵ *Op. cit.* p. 51.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.* p. 39.

¹⁷ Interview by William Wright, Summer 1950 (for broadcasting, but never used); as quoted in *Abstract Expressionism: Creators and Critics*, New York, Clifford Ross, Abrahams Publishers,1990.

CAN HOW TO CREATE BE TAUGHT

In the same way, when you try to teach a child how to bounce flat pebbles in *ricochets* over water, you have the greatest difficulty to explain the thing, whereas you know very well that to obtain a rebound, the vibration of your wrist is necessary and has to be practiced ; but you know it intimately as a vague obviousness. And have you ever tried to teach somebody how to whistle ?

Many a practice is difficult to « didactize » which is yet so simple that everyone can do it. As a nice example, here are below instructions found in a handbook for the military preparation of the french army in 1939. Before dealing with the most complex subject of marching together, bringing in the supplementary difficulty of synchronization, it first explains the basic principles of simple walking itself :

- « Carry the weight of the body slightly forwards on the right leg .
- Carry vigorously the left foot forwards, grazing the ground ; lay it down, heel first, 75 centimeters away from the right foot which you raise up, the weight of the body being held by the left foot.
- Then bring the right leg forwards ; and put the right foot at the same distance and in the same way as explained for the left foot.
- Continue walking, keeping the head in direct position, and leaving the arms in a swing, the left arm being always backwards when the right leg gets forwards and vice-versa ; keep hands open and fingers together. »¹⁸

This example may seem a little exaggerated, but, as through the magnifying glass, it helps to see better. Reading those instructions makes you think you will never succeed in walking. Because the only way of learning how to walk is intuitive. Any baby can tell you ! A rationalized education like this one is absolutely ineffective. Worse than that! It is counterproductive as can be an art education that would summon the student to explain the process before it could have hatched out pragmatically. Back to bicycle ! You don't learn how to ride it by dissociating the operations : first learn to remain in balance, and then learn to paddle and go. It is precisely the motion that gives balance. But to reach it, you have to accept unsteadyness. Creation cannot be taught. Only the conditions that make it possible can be given to help the self-experience of it.

CONCENTRATION, EMPTYNESS AND FULLNESS

This idea of a floating attention in the mind of the artist or scientist and this *subtle*¹⁹ conception of human spirit, might seem far away from our occidental way of thinking but is a truism in oriental wisdoms. Concerning yoga, transcendental meditation, taoïsm, or zen philosophy, emptyness is a familiar notion and concrete reality. As an example, for the Chinese, emptyness or vacuum, *wu*, is not, as it is for us, void or nothingness, that is to say absence, as meant when you say you are « broke », but, on the contrary, it is a kind of absolute presence that makes fullness possible. It is the origin of what Ehrenzweig points out as « undifferentiation ». Without entering the details of this question that has been developped in its whole complexity by François Cheng namely, let us just recall this nice aphorism of Lao-Tzu saying that if a vase is made of clay, it is its emptyness that

¹⁸ *Manuel de Préparation militaire supérieure*, t. 2, *Infanterie 1^{re} et 2^e années*, Nancy-Paris-Strasbourg, Berger-Levrault, 1939, p. 35-36. (t. b. a.). The french troops were then fully prepared when entering the World War II and normally the landing in Normandy should not have been necessary.

¹⁹ « Subtle », from latin *sub-tela*, under the cloth.

allows to fill it.²⁰

Corresponding this ontology of emptiness, there is an attitude of quietness, *hsü*, to which every being should aim and which could be related to the state of *ataraxy* advocated by Epicureans, and that could be defined as a state of no need, of indifference, beyond desire. It could be compared to the *virtue* of Stoic philosophers like Seneca, for instance, as well. Those two philosophical attitudes have often been opposed one to another whereas they seem to me very similar. It might even have something to do with the « *beauté d'indifférence* » that Marcel Duchamp seeks in his *ready-mades*.

The type of concentration necessary to the artist is not a sustained attention, but a kind of loose control. Many artists confirm it, whose statements often sounds like oriental aphorisms. Lets us take briefly three examples in the past century, yet very different one from another : Klee , Matisse, Dubuffet.

In *The Thinking Eye*, which brings together unpublished writings, namely educational, can be read the kind of guidance Paul Klee would give his students at the Bauhaus for their first lesson :

« As a negative pole, chaos is not, properly speaking, intrinsic chaos but it represents a notion in a precise position, defined in relation with the notion of cosmos. Chaos, at its proper meaning, never could take place on the scales ; it will stay eternally imponderable and unmeasurable. It can be nothing or be « something » at the state of half-sleep, death or birth, according to the data : intention or lack of intention, will or negation of will. The symbol of this « non-notion » is the point. It is not, to tell true, a real point but the mathematical point. This something-nothing, or even this materialized nothingness, is an unconcievable concept, characterized by absence of contrast. If it is given a perceivable significance (that is to say if finality it is introduced inside chaos), one gets the concept of grey, decisive point of the becoming of evolution : in other terms, the grey point. This point is grey because it is placed neither high nor low and because it is placed high as well as low. It is grey because it is neither hot nor cold ; it is grey because it is a point without any dimension... »²¹

Striking is the correspondance between this explicitation of the visual metaphysics as proposed by Klee's paintings and this description of a kind of pre-rational thought. The emphatic tone in which it is said could seem esoteric and doctrinal, even irritating, but it is shared by most of the artists of the « avant-gardes » (as Malevitch, Kandinsky or Mondrian). Klee's educational attitude appears to be a little « guru-like ». Actually there are similarities with the mental visualization on which are based tibetan *hatha-yoga* exercises, for example, in which the concentration through blankness is practiced under the name of *ékâgratâ* : the spirit intensely controls *indriyas*, which are the subtle principles of the efficiency of our five senses. By the way, the great specialist of oriental religions, Jean Varenne, relate this nice anecdote :

« Well known is this story of a mathematician who, lost in his thoughts, found himself, while walking in Paris, facing a horse-carriage whose back, covered by a stretched tarpaulin, appeared to him as a perfect blackboard. Drawing a piece of chalk out of his pocket, he

²⁰ François Cheng, *Vide et plein, le langage pictural chinois*, Paris, Seuil, coll. « Points », 1991, p. 58.

²¹ Paul Klee, *The Thinking eye, La pensée créatrice* dans *Écrits sur l'art*, trad. S. Girard, t. 1, Paris, Dessain et Tolra, 1973, p. 3-4 (cité par Jean-Louis Ferrier, dans *Paul Klee*, Paris, éd. Terrail, 1998, p. 134-135). (translated from french by the author).

started to write down the data of the problem he was worrying about, unaware of this unusual situation ; and when the carriage started, the scientist was seen running behind it to pursue the procedure of his demonstration. This is what yogins name *ékâgratâ*, which is not distraction of a not much down-to-earth intellectual but, on the contrary, attentionate work of mental organ focussing its power on one and only object.»²²

What the quoted author does not say is that this strange behaving was Henri Poincaré's. This story brings a particular relief to what was said above about invention in mathematics.

Matisse did not care about being an educator, he was just talking about his own process, when about portrait he said :

« I understood that the composing mind must keep a sort of virginity about the chosen elements and reject what comes to him by reasoning. [...] After having blanked my brain, emptied it from preconcieved idea, I would be drawing this preliminary indication, with a hand that was only guided by my unconscious sensations, stemming from the model. I would avoid carefully introducing in this representation any intentional remark or rectifying a material mistake. The almost unconscious transcription of the model significance is the initial act of any work of art and particularly a portrait. »²³

Matisse can be looked on as a kind of « sage » and it is always very surprising to see him follow his personal spiritual way in parallel of an institutional religion he goes alongside without sharing the practice of it however, as in his correspondence with Father Couturier, for the elaboration of the project of the Vence chapel.²⁴

As described by Jean Dubuffet, too directional a grasp of reality will only focus on a detail. He recommends a global inputting. It is the paradox of the tree that hides the forest.

« Attention kills whay it touches. It is an error to believe that to look at things attentively you go to know them better. Because the eye spins like the silkworm so that, in an instant, it wraps itself inside an opaque cocoon which deprives you of any sight. That is why painters who stare at their model don't catch of it anything at all. »²⁵

In Dubuffet there is however a supplementary paradox : there is no « oriental » wisdom like in Klee or Matisse, but void is obtained through saturation of a quite « occidental » overflowing, just like the profusion of our consumer society. Thus, he seems to have used as a meditation chamber his *cabinet logologique*, set up by him in *Villa Falbala*, he had designed in Périgny-sur-Yerres. There the walls are covered with characteristic drawings of his « Hourloupe » period (in the sixties). In these drawings, drawn in black and sometimes streaked with blue or red hatchings, overlap and combine with one another various objects and uncountable figures, the proliferation of which makes them eventually disappear.

²² Jean Varenne, *Aux sources du yoga*, Paris, Jacqueline Renard, 1989, p. 121. (t. b. a.). This scene had inspired draughtsman Christophe around 1900 for his comic strip *Le Savant Cosinus*

²³ Henri Matisse, *Écrits et propos sur l'art*, Paris, Hermann, 1972, p. 178. (t. b. a.)

²⁴ Henri Matisse, M-A. Couturier, L-B. Rayssiguier, *La chapelle de Vence, journal d'une création*, Paris, coédition Cerf - Menil Foundation - Skira, 1993.

²⁵ Jean Dubuffet, *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants.*, t. 2, Paris, Gallimard, 1967, p. 61. (t. b. a.)

BRAIN ORGANIZATION

What artists could express about their processing at work often corresponds with facts that are scientifically established. Neurobiologists have now highlighted the diversity of mental occupations and their different location according to what they consist of. The right side of the brain, more involved in sight and space, would be the centre of our emotions, the intuitive side, whereas the left side would govern language and rational operations. All this is of course much more complex and one must be cautious not to content with excessive simplifications. But the idea of a dissymetry of our mental activity is now well admitted, in the same way as we are right- or lefthanded, as we have a guiding eye and a take-off foot. It thus seems that the intuitions of the wise men of the East and those of the artists who try to tell their method find a correspondence with a scientific explanation. It would anyhow be comforting.

Interesting is to point up that, despite simplification and exploitation of scientific explanation which they are based on, certain methods of learning can be very effective. I think in particular of the one who was formalized by the American Betty Edwards. As in advertisements for a treatment against baldness which present the pictures of the subject before and after its benefits, she shows her « patients »' drawings at first and a few weeks later. The profits are spectacular and the proposed exercises are very didactic. They are demonstrative of the mental attitude one must adopt to be a successful draughtsman. It is a kind of exercising that aims to jam the solidly anchored habits which impede us from drawing easily and without feeling illegitimate. They consist, for example, in reproducing with a pencil a photograph in black and white or a drawing, presented upside down, so that, instead of identifying intellectually the various elements and interpreting the document as an image of a face, one grasps it only as different values or grey, organized into a hierarchy from black to white, or as a spatial arrangement of lines located in relation to one another. Another exercise consists in drawing a set of objects by following the outlines of the negative spaces which separate them, in order to grasp them no longer through the filter of reasoning. Here is an example of Betty Edwards's prose :

« The exercises [...] are designed specifically to help you understand the shift from dominant left-hemisphere mode (L-mode) to subdominant R-mode. I could go on describing the process in words, but only you can experience for yourself this cognitive shift, this slight change in subjective state. As Fats Waller once said, « If you gotta ask what jazz is, you ain't never gotta know. »²⁶

Having myself made use of some of her suggested exercises with children or students, I can say how efficient they sometimes are to help to understand precisely the nature of the difficulties that one has to overcome. But, behind that method of learning how to draw, hides a very normative aesthetic which prompts obviously to be cautious. For instance, she presents to her pupils two drawings of Van Gogh :

« Van Gogh », she says, « worked as an artist the last ten years of his life, from the age of 27 until he died at 37. During the first two years of that decade, Van Gogh did draw only, teaching himself how to draw. As you can see in the drawing of the *Carpenter*, he struggled with problems of proportion and placement of forms. By 1882, however – two years later –

²⁶ Betty Edwards, *Dessiner grâce au cerveau droit*, Liège, Mardaga, 1979, p. 46. *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, 1979 (revised and reprinted in 1989, 1999, and 2012), Penguin Putnam.

in his *Woman mourning* Van Gogh had overcome his difficulties with drawing and increased the expressive quality of his work ».²⁷

The aesthetic prejudice lies in that idea that the expressive quality would be proportional compliance of a drawing with a conventional « realistic » representation, that is to say meant with codes inherited from Renaissance painting, nearly six centuries ago. What about the artists mentioned above then, like Klee, Matisse or Dubuffet ? And what about Jean-Michel Basquiat's dreadfully expressive paintings for instance ? Should he have taken lessons with Betty ? When you look at the drawings of Betty Edwards's pupils you would rather find the first ones, that look like sorts of naive « art brut » creations, much more expressive than those resulting from the learning, which are desperately insipid and fanciless. This is always the problem when you try to define the rules of creativity or expressiveness. But her exercises are very good to gain selfconfidence and to free oneself from the fate of clumsiness, and they can be very useful sometimes as well to offset to excess of some *blissfoolish* « creativity »-based education.

VARIOUS MOMENTS OF CREATION

Involved in a creative research, the artist, according to Ehrenzweig, is at first facing some fragmentation. What happens does not fit with what he wanted. His conscious will is impeded and he has a feeling of dissatisfaction. This is an unavoidable first stage of creation and this « fragmentation » is a reflection of the fragmentation of the artist's own personality. He often feels like being the involuntary witness of accidents that have nothing to do with him. Resistance that the medium put up to what was projected arouses him or her to a strong frustration. Things does not go as wanted. One could say it is the collapse of secondary process. It is the *schizoid* phase. It could be illustrated by the romantic image of the painter « fighting » with the canvas !

A second step is this of « unconscious scanning » already mentioned. This is the *maniac* phase. Without however abolishing disruption, although fragmentation at the surface does not heal, a global unconscious substructure appears that links the fragmented elements in a syncretic way and that reveals itself as the matrix of the work. Thus emerges a « hidden order ». This second phase corresponds with a phantasm of return to uterus. It can be associated with an *oceanic* state, to take up a term Freud uses to qualify religious experience, mystical for instance. For Ehrenzweig this is not necessarily a state of pathological regression, but the result of an extreme *dedifferentiation* that characterizes the most underlying personality in a creation process. This phase could match the mythology of inspiration.

The third moment is this of a *re-introjection* of a part of the substructure enlightened in the inner self of the artist at higher mental level. One could even say that the work imposes itself upon the artist, almost in spite of him, as far as he or she cannot justify it, because it still does not correspond to what was expected at first. But it has to be coped with in the hope of a future integration. That is the reason why this further stage is a *depressive* phase. It comes along with an anxiety that is connected with *melancholy* which is consubstantial with the idea of *genius*. Little by little this new coherence found by the artist will be consciously likened by the secondary process.

There is a fourth moment which Ehrenzweig does not talk about and which is for the artist the time of exhibition. This would correspond to verification for the mathematician. It is the time of release. It is not only the matter of the reception by the spectator nor the influence of the taste or the wait of the public on the artist behaviour which would be another point. Just regarding the creation process, by exposing his or her work, the artist exposes himself or herself to critic, to negation. There is a

²⁷ *Ibid.* p.16

endangerment. But by getting free of him – or of her, as a newborn child inaugurates its autonomy by parting from his mother – the work occurs to the artist in a different and distanced way. In this respect, the space of the studio and the place of exhibition are fundamentally different. The sight of one's own exposed work gives the artist the possibility to validate it. People often worry about the fact it would be difficult for an artist to sell a piece and to part from it even if it brings money. Actually it is rather a liberating satisfaction to see that the work has been recognized and adopted by somebody else. It is the proof it works on its own. And the lack that its departure can arouse obliges exactly the artist to get back into the saddle in order to replace it. The capacity of overcoming such a moment is, I believe, the confirmation of an artist's posture.

It is necessary to insist on the fact that these various moments are not really successive stages but an articulation between various states, various attitudes which alternate in the progress of the process but can also overlap or jumble together. They can be situated in different timescales. Thus, for example, the fourth moment of validation can happen as a retrospective in a museum at the end of a several years period of work, but it can consist, after a couple of weeks of a search, in a studio « *accrochage* », like these photographs of Picasso with all the piled up paintings hanging above one another. It can be, at any time, after a few minutes action, the three steps backwards, just to see how it works.

AN ETHICS OF CREATION

Unlike to a morality which would be dictated by ideological prejudices, it results from the understanding of the creative act, such as described by Ehrenzweig, an ethics of creation, and presumably even an ethics as such, that meets moral values such as humility, courage, generosity or love... which exceed very widely the only domain of creation. They are not dogmatic virtues one should conform to, but they are imperative attitudes to make creation possible.

As the work is partially beyond control, by experiencing creation, the artist is obliged straightaway to a certain renunciation. This is perceptible from the first phase when the artist sees the project slipping away. It is no reluctant resignation but an active acceptance. French painter Pierre Soulages summarizes it nicely : « To paint, it is to escape ceaselessly from a project »²⁸.

Here is a difficult paradox to accept. At the same time, the artist has to engage all his personality and energy in acting but he has to give up checking everything and to put away his ego. It is necessary to make efficient a stream of volition while maintaining decreasing the power of an authoritative will ! To this respect, dutch painter Bram Van Velde, hermit in painting, goes even further when, with an almost taoist accent, he says contradictorily :

« Most live under the reign of the will. The artist is the one who is without a will.[...] Each canvas represents a moment when we could, when we had the strength. »²⁹

He has to accept himself as he is, with his limits and not as he would like to be. Far from a well anchored prejudice, it is the opposite of a narcissistic attitude. One could not say, for example, that the selfportraits which Rembrandt repeated throughout his life express selfsatisfaction. On the contrary they picture his uneasy inquiry about who or what he is. For Ehrenzweig, there is thus in creation a shape of humility already.

²⁸ From a film on Pierre Soulages shot in 1980 by J. M. Meurice, a painter himself too ;.(t. b. a.).

²⁹ Charles Juliet, *Rencontres avec Bram Van Velde*, Fontfroide le Haut, Fata Morgana, 1978. (t. b. a.).

« To accept the work's independent life requires a humility that is an essential part of creativity; it also presupposes a lessening of the personality. »³⁰

The autonomous life of the work, it is at first its material existence. Its materiality obeys proper rules on which the artist has no influence. The material exists independently of him. It resists him. There is thus a confrontation in which the artist has to make a commitment. The paradigm of this could be seen in the cutting of marble by Michelangelo, for example. « Strength » is necessary, but much more as muscular strength, a certain courage is required to face the block and tackle it. In Picasso, something tragic takes place in this confrontation which involves both material and psychic reality:

« For me, to paint a picture, it is to commit a dramatic action during which the reality finds itself torn. This drama gets the upper hand over any other consideration. What matters, it is the drama of the very act, the moment when the universe escapes and faces its own destruction. »³¹

The fact has to be accepted that it is only throughout this confrontation that something will be happening. That is the meaning of french poet Théophile Gautier's injunction to the artist :

« Yes, finer comes out the piece
From a form against work
Rebel [...]
Let your floating dream
Embed
The resisting block ! »³²

This raises moreover the question of the place of the sensitiveness in creation. Whatever the period every piece of art does operate aesthetically, that is to say, produces in the one who contemplates it a sensation (*aisthesis* in greek). Some conceptual artists claim their concern is outside this confrontation. If it were the case, they would miss the opportunity (*kairos*) of real creation. But it seems to me that, in this extreme artistic attitude - as when one studies the borderline cases of a mathematical function -, the confrontation with the sensitiveness takes place in several manners : at first in its withdrawal, in an experience of void or silence which is as much sensitive an experience of fullness or noise, although it is more difficult to perceive because it needs more intense a concentration. Then sensitiveness is necessarily implemented in the means they use, as an electronic bulletin board for Jenny Holzer, for example, or inscriptions on walls for Lawrence Weiner. And finally widening the notion of sensitivity, they make use of the linguistic or institutional codes and work their « plasticity », as a « material » in a « enlarged understanding », as Joseph Beuys meant about art in general. And quite often, they even have to struggle with them. For Ehrenzweig this confrontation appears fundamentally as a frustration.

³⁰ Ehrenzweig, *Op. cit.* p. 145.

³¹ Picasso, *Op. cit.* p. 118-119. (t. b. a.).

³² Théophile Gautier, « L'art », dans *Émaux et camées, Poésies complètes*, Paris, éd. Garnier, coll. Classiques, 1954. (t. b. a.). This quote does not imply of course any agreement of mine on the ideology of « l'art pour l'art » (art for art's sake) professed by the « Parnassiens » which, as regards the painters, Baudelaire used to call « les pointus » (the sharp ones).

« The medium, by frustrating the artist's purely conscious intentions, allows him to contact more submerged parts of his own personality and draw them up for conscious contemplation »³³

This resistance gives the work in progress the status of something like an *alter ego*. Quoting Adrian Stokes, Ehrenzweig even speaks about the « otherness » of the work of art. It joins moreover the conception of René Passeron which sees in the creative work a « pseudo-person »³⁴ with whom the artist has necessarily to make « conversation ». Jean Dubuffet says it abruptly :

« Art has to arise from the material and from the tool and it has to keep the trace of the tool and the fight of the tool with the material. The man has to speak but the tool also and the material also. »³⁵

Joan Miro expresses very well this idea of a dialogue with the respect due toward an interlocutor :

« Obviously; it is necessary to have the highest respect for the material. It is the starting point. It dictates the work. It imposes it. [...] A dialogue exists. It is obvious; a dialogue with the material becomes established. When you make some ceramic, the material of the vase dictates what to do. It imposes its laws. »³⁶

This thus obliges to accept something else than what we waited and expected. Ehrenzweig refers to his experience as a teacher at the Goldsmith College of the University of London, where he trained art teachers. He could notice how much the trouble they had to accept their own spontaneity and their overflowing from a stiff programming in their personal artistic works, was related with their difficulty to stand the nonetheless fertile unruliness of their young pupils who did not « respect » their instructions. Stiffness regarding the work in progress is the same as what happens in the relationship to the other. A form of generosity is the condition for art and it widely exceeds the sole question of creation.

« One can also say that all good personal relationships contain an element of creativeness. This entails a measure of generosity, humility and a lack of envy. We must not only be able to give away parts of our self to a loved person, but must be willing to take them back into ourselves enriched by the accretions stemming from the other's independent personality. Taking back, in a way, needs more generosity and lack of envy than the initial free projection. If a neurotic person has to dominate and control another person in order to love him, he can only take back from him what he himself had deliberately put into him. Possessive parents love their child in this sterile and sterilizing way. An immature artist who is hell-bent on exerting full control over his work is incapable of accepting that a work of art contains more than what he had (consciously) put into it. »³⁷

³³ Ehrenzweig, *Op. cit.* p. 93.

³⁴ See footnote ¹⁴.

³⁵ Dubuffet, *Op. cit.* t. 2, p. 57. (t. b. a.)

³⁶ Interview with Joan Miro, in *Le monologue du peintre*, Georges Charbonnier, Neuilly-sur-Seine, Guy Durier, 1980. (t. b. a.)

³⁷ Ehrenzweig, *Op. cit.* p. 145.

Let's come back now to much more pragmatic facts and try to describe the art process in a functional way with the various abilities it requires. To illustrate it, examples from very different periods will be taken that could seem anachronistic, but, despite the different historical contexts regarding their cultural reception, the process of their outbreak may be quite similar. Their « poietic » as Paul Valéry and, after him, René Passeron has called it³⁸, might be prompted by a kind of anthropological invariant. What is aimed now is neither a psychological explanation nor an interpretation of the works, but a try to report the artist's process and to clear principles which sometimes sound like concrete instructions of a swimming coach, as are the advices which I can give moreover to my students in the studio.

INVENTION, INTENTION : THE MENTAL BALANCE

In the course of the creation process, the artist is confronted with certain recurring difficulties. They appear with a changeable magnitude and can turn up at any time. The first difficulty to overcome in an artistic experience is to become familiar with the mental gymnastics of a seesaw between exploration and selection, between invention and intention. In the *Genesis*, the figure of the archetypal Creator, God himself, does not appear to have had of plan, a « design » in prerequisite to his creation. He was just bored of being alone in his perfection. He had seen nobody for eternity ! If he had thought out his creation, he probably would not have committed the error which then leads him to a second thought and make him decide to offer his brand new creature an *alter ego*. He just produced a creature in his image, and what he has created only reproduces solitude, at his resemblance. This archetypal narrative of the Creator as a potter, describes an experimental approach, on the whole even pragmatic. It is only in a reflexive return that « God saw that it was good ». Thus it seems to have happened as if the Creator had created without planning what the result would be. Moreover creating is necessarily accompanied by accepting to lose control. The creator has to let it go and, if he does not want to remain in a dull loneliness, his creation must be free, and subsequently it has to escape from him. If there is « conception » in the act of creation, thus it is doubtless to be understood in its genetic, or even genital sense, not in a « conceptual » or intellectual meaning.

When Picasso says : « I don't search, I find », he does not express the conceit of an art hunter boasting he never returns empty-handed from his adventures, as it is often interpreted. Quite the opposite, it is a kind of immodest humility – but modesty and humility are not the same thing. He testifies to what is undoubtedly at the source of any creation : invention. The word comes from Latin *in-venire*, to come upon, as if by chance. In french, « *inventeur* » is the legal term, as well, that qualifies somebody who happens to find an object in the street, a wreck in the sea. As for the inventors, for the scientists who make discoveries, their inventions often appear to them as a stroke of luck : isn't it the stroke of... an apple which puts Newton on the track to universal gravitation...

³⁸ - Opposed to the mythology of inspiration, Paul Valéry always showed the highest interest in the process of constitution of the works, as well poetic as pictorial. This concern scans all his thought from his *Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci* (1894) until *Degas, danse, dessin* (1938). To define what « poietics » is for him, refer to Paul Valéry, *Œuvres I*, Paris, Gallimard, « la Pléiade », 1957, p. 1342 et sq.

- René Passeron, « Pour une approche poïétique de la création », *Les Enjeux*, Tome 1, Paris, Encyclopaedia Universalis, 1993, p. 433 et sq. In this article are explained very clearly the outlines of « poietics » : « Poietics is the scientific and philosophic study of the institution [of the works]. Formal, its object is the combinatoric of the possible institutions. Dialectic, it studies the fight of the creator with the material of the work. Applied, it can help to introduce more imagination into the practices of management and education ». Passeron was a painter himself and his major book concerns particularly painting : *L'œuvre picturale et les fonctions de l'apparence*, (3^e édition), Paris, Vrin, 1992. (t. b. a.)

Artistic inventions often shows themselves in this way too. It does not mean that there is no logic, no reason, no idea behind them, but the idea is veiled, in a sense, and the invention just seems a chance encounter. Thus, to allow the « hidden order » to uncover, to be dis-covered - other verb to say invention - it may be necessary, at first, to move away from intention.

At the risk of simplification, let us put it in a simply logical reasoning : we could say that creation begins by exploring a combinatoric without preconceived ideas. On the opposite, if my action were directly the result of a « design » (from Latin *designare*, to indicate), the result of an « intention » (from Latin, *in-tendere*, to strain), it would face me towards the first – if not the unique – solution which I could have thought of « spontaneously », that is to say, by following the slippery slope of my habits and prejudices . And among all the uncountable possible solutions it would certainly not be the best one, or moreover presumably not even a relevant solution at all. If I work in an undecided way, in a flexible state of mind, with « plasticity », if I loosen it a bit, I shall permit a large number of combinations to appear, among which there will necessarily be something more appropriate than the very one towards which I would have straightaway dashed, guided only by the strength of my will. That's why we often say « as luck would have it »! The help of chance constitutes in certain cases, a way of opening the range of possibilities but it does not grant a success, by itself. We could put it in comparison with the processes of the genetic evolution which obeys to the laws of chance. But, among all the possible layouts, only remains the very rare which resists bad weather, diseases and predatory attacks. Nobody questions the natural selection since Darwin and, oddly enough, when it is no longer about pro-creation but just about creation, reason sinks into totally absurd imaginings

From a very functional point of view, if I were trying to lay out three graphic elements, a title, a text and an image, for example, the best way would probably not be to stick them after one another upon a big sheet of paper, but to put down the three of them and to move them around to find empirically a display that would seem to me well-balanced or maybe, on the contrary, expressive. And then but only then I would fix them. It is what René Passeron calls « formal poietics » :

« It could be close to Hjelmslev's glossematics and calculate the combinatoric of the possible institutions from elements given by a system ». ³⁹

In some *collages* by Picasso or Matisse, you can see the needles or thumbtacks implemented to stick the pieces of paper they are made of. It underlines the act of decision which put an end to the open phase of exploration. One of the keys of creation thus seems to be a capacity to act without voluntarism, but by being guided by intuition through trials and errors. Such a mental attitude is particularly obvious in an artistic work but it is not specific to art. When you drive your car for instance, hopefully you are not clutching the wheel, assessing what decision to set, but in a much looser mental attitude, in a quite intuitive receptiveness, so that, you are globally aware of the dangers and obstacles of the road but you do not calculate them, you do not think them out. It had been said that, when landing, airline pilots trust more their intuitive estimation of the size of the airstrip grains, than the precise indications of their dashboard.

CHOICE AND DISCRIMINATION

Contrary to a new religion - new for some time already! - who claims to be more or less directly related to dadaism or surrealism, if chance can enrich the combinatoric, it does not mean that all

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 438. (t. b. a.)

which results from it will be good. Jean Arp, for instance, is said, in 1916, to have thrown in the air small pieces of paper and to have stuck them where they did fall. Yet you can see on photographs that the bits did not fall in a bad way, and these collages are powerfully structured. Random sampling did certainly not concern thus the architecture of the collage itself, but only the sequence organization of the scraps of paper. In the same way, it is very difficult to trace spontaneously « any » triangle. It will be most of the time isosceles if not **equilateral** or right-angled. Jean Arp doubtless wanted the order of the sequence to be arbitrary. But, even by reducing the role of random to that, we are obliged to admit that he made a sorting, and only kept those who seemed suitable to him because they corresponded to this vague idea of a « any » display. It is quite clear if you read carefully what himself said on this matter:

« As the arrangement of the plans, their proportions and their colors seemed to depend only on random, I declared that these works were ordered "according to the law of chance", such as in the order of nature, chance being for me only a restricted part of an imperceptible reason for being, of an inaccessible order as a whole. »⁴⁰

Commentators make Arp say the opposite of his thought. Serge Lemoine however says that « every piece of paper is drawn lots in theory », what brings a rather clear limitation to this assertion. This short history is important because it is a major argument of the zealots of chance or even random in art. It is like certain disenchanting couples that, after years of common life, used to assert - it was frequently heard about thirty years ago - that they were together by accident. But if you can say, if need be, that the meeting was by chance – though coincidence often finds an explanation in determinations which are not really unpredictable, sociological in particular – the choice to stay together has no longer to do with chance, even though the cause would be a lack of courage to part.

Thus the second type of difficulty lies in not being able to discriminate. You often have to decide between one thing and the other. Both together would nullify, they would be mutually a parasite. And it is doubtless rather in a selecting mode, that intervenes critical discernment. Intention intervenes, so to speak, in a return - even if it can happen quickly - but very little at first as a starting point. This might seem very abstract but it is quite concrete in the material decisions one has to set when painting, for instance.

Thus the posture of creation seems to me to be characterized by this mental seesaw between two attitudes : on one hand an openmindedness, an availability towards the possible, and, on the other, a closure, a merciless selection. One will find the image according to one's taste to illustrate this binary phenomenon : alternated movements of breath for the insomniacs ; stretching of the opposing muscles for the partisans of callanetics ; antagonism of the right and the left sides of brain for the upholders of a rationalist biology ; masculine vs feminine for those who are not enthusiastic about gender studies ; yin and yang or *tamas* and *raja* for the follower of oriental philosophies ; sense and sensibility for Jane Austen's friends ; spirit of geometry and spirit of fineness for neopascalian jansenists ; procession and emanation for the disciples of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite...

At every moment the path takes shape. In a permanent check. We have already evoked three steps backwards of the painter to depolarize the spirit. A small movie shows Antoni Tàpies making a big painting on the ground and getting up almost every ten seconds to judge his work. Certain tricks are well known, as to look at the picture back to front, or the trick with the mirror which Leonardo already recommended

⁴⁰ Quoted by Serge Lemoine in *Dada*, Paris, Hazan, 1986, p. 20. (t. b. a.)

« [...] by painting you have to hold a flat mirror and often look through it at your work; you will see it then inverted and it will seem to you of the hand of another master ; so you can better judge its faults than in any other way. »⁴¹

The end is then a moment like the others. Death might be a little that. One does not really know at once if it goes on or if it stops. Matisse took responsibility for this remark of Renoir :

« The one who cannot find, having turned one's painting three months to face the wall, what is lacking in it, does not need to be a painter. »⁴²

Pierre Soulages echoes him and clarifies this moment of the discernment that way :

« [...] I am too much taken by the current painting), I have to get through it. It has to end either by a failure or by something which, I think, will be able to live. When the painting is completed, I turn it to face the wall, and I wait for a long time before looking at it again. I wait moreover longer when I expect it to be disastrous. And when I see it again, in case I have to admit it is true, I remove it from the frame and I destroy it. »⁴³.

CONSTRUCTION, DESTRUCTION, RECONSTRUCTION⁴⁴

Let us take the example of Jackson Pollock's paintings. Hans Namuth's famous photographs shows his passionate gesture in the studio, projecting paint on the canvas stretched out on the ground. The large format and the horizontal position of the subject as a swimming pool, makes him « plunge » more easily into action. But he knows how to swim! As we saw, he « den[ies] the accident ». The work of the unconscious is often mistaken for chance. Ehrenzweig also notices that the dripping and the splashing hardly announce in the accident :

There is precious little true accident about dripping and splashing paint. Seen in this way a clever use of accident is as old as art itself. The most skilled techniques of nineteenth-century art knew how to make use of seemingly uncontrollable techniques. The clever water-colourist delights in the untamable spreading of running wet colour.⁴⁵ ».

I would venture to say that, for me, some Pollock's drippings are more successful than others. By questioning this impression, I noticed that those I prefer seem to result from a work in two phases. The initial gesture of the projection expresses its powerful energy but above one can discern covering traces of paint, often in a different colour, and sometimes in the shape of wider spots, which, by masking certain parts of the dripping, channel its energy. It works like reframing the

⁴¹ Léonard de Vinci, *Carnets*, Paris, Gallimard, 1987, t. 2, p. 260 (t. b. a.)

⁴² Matisse, *Op. cit.* p. 158. (t. b. a.)

⁴³ Charles Juliet, *Entretiens avec Pierre Soulages*, Caen, L'Échoppe, 1990 (t. b. a.).

⁴⁴ The term « déconstruction », invented by Jacques Derrida, would certainly correspond very well to what I try to express here. Unfortunately I don't feel any intellectual affinity with his thought that seems to me needlessly obscure, in particular in his book *La vérité en peinture*, Paris, éd. Flammarion, coll. Champs, 1978, whose title was nevertheless terribly promising. I avoid thus voluntarily the use of this word. My aim is to try to clarify the darkness of creation, not to make it more obscure.

⁴⁵ Ehrenzweig, *Op. cit.* p. 97.

many details which, by selecting and by ranking, reconstruct and strengthen the painting. The hypothesis becomes then plausible of a work almost in two phases, clearly recognizable, as the painter himself acknowledges it :

« When I am *in* my painting, I am not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a short of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. »⁴⁶

We also know that Pollock used to reframe his immense drippings, in cutting them into smaller canvasses. In a lesser proportion, because he made it in the margins, Pierre Bonnard too, used to take back his paintings, by cutting the free canvas he had been working on only tacked on the wall, and by stretching it on a frame just at the end. It is not surprising that at Pollock, afterwards, in 1953, figurative representation even seems to resurface, with the regret from the official critics, as in *The Deep*⁴⁷ where the covering by the white paint redraws it in negative, as a wide gap, and even more obviously still in *Portrait and a Dream* of the same year.

At Picasso this moment of discernment intervenes in a different manner which could seem masochistic. We recognize the fellow countryman of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, whose spiritual exercises⁴⁸ are based on physical and mental self-testing of the redeeming believer !

« Christian Zervos hears Picasso say: " At me, a picture is a sum of destructions. [...] at first, there always is what represents completion for so many others ; the masterpiece, the drawing which grabs the world at lightning speed, the docile watercolor in its most subtle delicacies, the gouache and even the oil fixing perfect improvisations; and everything starts with the courage to break this success, to analyze it, that is to say to destroy it in the aim to reach then a designed synthesis, chosen and necessary ". »⁴⁹

A french proverb says : « *Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien* ». On the contrary, one could express that in art "the good is the enemy of the best". This principle could even be made out to a *modus operandi*, particularly perceptible in *The Mystery Picasso*⁵⁰ where we see the artist at work. His theatrical side makes him exaggerate certainly. However the systematic character of his method appears clearly. It consists in destroying what has been made to test if it is valid or not. That is also the reason why Picasso speaks of his work process as a « drama ». But at the same time, it is a « game ». If destruction goes too far, nothing is irreparable: he just plays at it again.

⁴⁶ Quoted by Emmerling, *Ibid*, p. 65.

⁴⁷ Jackson Pollock, *The Deep*, 1953, oil and enamel on canvas, 220,4 x 150,2 cm, Paris Musée National d'Art Moderne, and *Portrait and a Dream*, 1953, oil and enamel on canvas, 148,6 x 342,2 cm, Dallas Museum of Art, *ibid*, p. 83 et 84-85.

⁴⁸ « Discernment » is precisely the purpose of the ignatian approach : « [...] For as strolling, walking and running are bodily exercises, so every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all the disordered tendencies, and, after it is rid, to seek and find the Divine Will as to the management of one's life for the salvation of the soul, is called a Spiritual Exercise ». Saint Ignace de Loyola, *Exercices spirituels*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1963, p. 13.

⁴⁹ Pierre Daix, *La Vie de peintre de Pablo Picasso*, Paris, Seuil, 1977, p. 21 (t. b. a.).

⁵⁰ In this famous movie, *Le Mystère Picasso*, of Henri-Georges Clouzot (1956) Picasso is at work. The first part shows, shot from backward, drawings in progress, made first with a marker (a quite recent American invention at that time) and then with ink. The artist sets perceptible choices and decisions. The second part shows oil paintings in progress, filmed in stop motion and hanging on a few seconds, so that their successive states highlight clearly the systematic practice of « destruction » by the painter.

Another example of such a demandingness and destruction can be seen in the castle Sforza in Milan with the *Rondanini Pietà*, Michelangelo's last work : it is a marble group representing dead Christ supported by his mother. Only, there is one arm too much, detached from the rest, a right hand of Christ where the muscles are exactly designed and which testifies of a previous state when this sculpture was brilliant and virtuoso, in contrast with the character of incompleteness that shows the traces of the gradine. All this gives this pietà the divested fervour of a Romanesque sculpture : to tell the truth, you do not know any more if it is Madonna holding Christ in her arms either the opposite that could quite well express the idea of redemption : Christ carrying the suffering of the world on his back, as a father would carry his little child during a walk. In a previous version of the same scene, a few years before, in his *Bandini Pietà*⁵¹, he represented himself as Nicodemus, a disciple of Jesus who participated in his entombment. This theme is central for Michelangelo, as a subject for meditation, not to speak about his very early Pietà in Rome, when he was twenty five. In the *Bandini Pietà* appear all his virtuosity : he did solve all the difficulties which raises articulating four figures, each one playing a different expressive role. But already, in a fit of destructive rage, he had been mutilating its Christ whose remaining still shows how he had brought virtuosity to such a peak. A few days before his death – he was eighty nine! - he undertook to reshape completely the *Rondanini* such as we see it now, without probably having time to go up to the end⁵². This Michelangelo's last work is inevitably a kind of testament, a mystical *Less is more*, which testifies of a renunciation of all which could be only vanity, even though it would be the art of the greatest sculptor of his time, if not of all times. An artistic and spiritual demandingness.

THE FRUITFUL TENSION

A third difficulty is linked to the common prejudice about freedom in creation and its romantic corollary : inspiration. Nothing comes from nothing. There is always a sum of determinations that leads us somewhere. But those determinations do not prevent freedom : we can accept or refuse. An artist is certainly led by an internal necessity, « the inner need », to quote Kandinsky, which cannot be reduced to only satisfying a desire : you cannot say Van Gogh painted for the fun of it⁵³ ! If an artist were only acting to enjoy himself, he would just be a dilettante (*diletto*, in Italian means delight).

« The inner need is built up of three mystical elements:

1°) Every artist, as a creator, has something in him which calls for expression (this is the element of personality).

2°) Every artist, as child of his age, is impelled to express the spirit of his age (this is the element of style) — dictated by the period and particular country to which the artist belongs (it is doubtful how long the latter distinction will continue to exist).

3°) Every artist, as a servant of art, has to help the cause of art (this is the element of pure artistry, which is constant in all ages and among all nationalities).

⁵¹ The *Rondanini Pietà* (1564), Milan, Castello Sforzesco, the *Bandini Pietà* (1550) Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo and the *San Pietro Pietà* (1499), Rome.

⁵² See the quite recent biography of the sculptor by Antonio Forcellino, *Michelangelo :A tormented life*, Cambridge, Polity, 2011.

⁵³ « Nul n'a jamais écrit ou peint, sculpté, modelé, construit, inventé que pour sortir de l'enfer. » Antonin Artaud, *Van Gogh, le suicidé de la société*, Paris, éd. Gallimard, coll. L'imaginaire, 2001, p. 60. « Nobody has ever written, painted, carved, modelled, built, invented anything if not to go out of hell. » (t. b. a.).

A full understanding of the first two elements is necessary for a realization of the third. »⁵⁴

This prophetic formulation is likely to make one smile today. But, though Kandinsky views it from the artist's side and not from the side of an exegete who interprets the work afterwards, this listing corresponds to the three levels of determination that try to highlight some specific approaches : 1 ° psychoanalysis (Freud), 2 ° history (Panofsky) and 3 ° anthropology (Lévi-Strauss⁵⁵). The « inner need » could find an explanation in the schemes cleared by each of these disciplines, each of which is aiming from its side to point out what the « hidden order » of art could be. This should be developed but it is not our subject in the present chapter. Kandinsky's third element might seem excessive, in being presented as something universal, but if we consider that there are anthropological invariants, in certain existential experiences : the feeling of love, desire, pleasure, the suffering, the mourning, death... for example, even if they are expressed in very different forms according to « ages » and « nationalities », that is to say according to various cultures and civilizations, it is either not to be excluded! Otherwise how could we still be moved by the works of the past? This was a question to which young Karl Marx himself had no definite answer :

« The difficulty we are confronted with is not, however, that of understanding how Greek art and epic poetry are associated with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still give us aesthetic pleasure and are in certain respects regarded as a standard and unattainable ideal. »⁵⁶

Most of the time this « internal necessity » will be pushed out by an « external necessity » which is a part of it : a commission, the term of an exhibition, a chance encounter, a proposal to collaborate or – why not? – the constraint of a school or university work... The is always a response to contingency without which nothing would ever happen. Baudelaire did acknowledge the part of those two elements :

« Beauty is made up of an eternal, invariable element, whose quantity it is excessively difficult to determine, and a relative circumstantial element, which will be, if you like, whether severally or all at once, its fashions, its morals, its emotions. Without this second element, which might be described as the amusing, enticing, appetizing icing in the divine cake, the first element would be beyond our powers of digestion or appreciation, neither adapted nor suitable to human nature. [...] Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable. »⁵⁷

The « appetizing icing » is important but « the divine cake » is essential and sometimes missing. Sometimes one remains a bit unsatisfied when the work is just limited to an implementation of contingency. But without this « outer need » there would doubtless be nothing. It is like the material which resists the sculptor who has to fight or at least to cope with it : a node in the wood, a vein in the marble, a technical accident... Otherwise nothing would come out. Instead of complaining thus

⁵⁴ Kandinsky, *Du spirituel dans l'art et dans la peinture en particulier* (1912), Paris, Denoël, 1969, p. 109-110.

⁵⁵ See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage*, Paris, Plon, coll. « Pocket », 2006.

⁵⁶ Karl Marx, *Introduction générale à la critique de l'économie politique* (1857) dans *Œuvres Économie*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « La Pléiade », 1963, t. 1, p. 266.

⁵⁷ Charles Baudelaire, *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (1863), dans *Curiosités esthétiques*, Paris, Garnier, coll. « Classiques », 1983, p. 456 et 467.

about the outer constraints, to be an artist requires to be able to utilize the fruitful tension. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a creation to emerge.

Familiar with these principles which are at work in the creation processes, the artist tries then to make them operate. He thus has to establish a method that, in many respects, looks like a game. And the game comes along with rules. The artist's method is governed by contradiction. We could say it is contained in the oxymoron of the *rules* of the *game*. The rule is something closed whereas the game is open.

THE GAME (AND ABOUT THE READY-MADES)

A game is a free, an indeterminate activity. In french, we say of two parts which joint loosely that they « play ». The result of the game is never known beforehand. Otherwise there would be no game ! The game is a matter of mobility, of plasticity. And the real purpose of the game is a simulation, a delusion, a « trompe-l'oeil ». We pretend to aim at the purpose dictated by the rules, but it is not the real purpose. We even think that we play to win but we play to play, to make a change, to clear our heads, to have fun.



Let us take an extreme case with the much debated ready-made of Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain* (1917). This urinal in white glazed earthenware and tipped over in 90 degrees is often given as the counter-example of the work of art in its traditional status as an « auratic » object⁵⁸. We could very well explain the upgrading of the ready-made object to the rank of work of creation, by resuming René Passeron's criteria as mentioned above : first, the object is not considered in its functional purpose. Second, the object is taken as a particular entity, individualized so to speak. This impression is paradoxally still stronger because, instead of a pebble or of a shell, collected on a beach which would be the only one of its species, this industrial object is a mass product. By exhibiting it, the contrast is thus more striking. And therefore, the strangeness in which we eventually perceive it confers on its peculiarity an appearance - a subjective reality maybe? - of its individual existence, which transforms it into a pseudo-person, that is to say in something that feeds our emotional being.

So tipped over in 90 degrees, it appears under a different angle. Thus the curve of the urinal arouses a vague erotic evocation of the feminine body: the hips, the pelvis, the womb, the vagina... or of a masculine sex too. Not forgetting that venereal inspiration is always very active in the toilet, you

⁵⁸ « Auratic » is taken in the sense of Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, translated by Harry Zohn, from the 1935 essay. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.

can imagine Duchamp's propensity for a wit on such a matter at a start. A white sanitary earthenware to which we are currently used, is another novelty for this time. Remember the zinc tubs in Degas' paintings or even still of Bonnard's! As a chronological mark, the *American Standard* company was established in 1875 in the United States. Third criterion : it would be hard to deny that the one who has the nerve to present such a thing commits himself. Especially as the current event of the First World War implies aggravating circumstances and makes this joke scandalous. That is why Duchamp can even be considered as a heroic artist. And on the whole, contrary to the fact that say doctrinal commentators, this might be a perfect example of an « auratic » piece of art.

The game is thus a kind of drift of the spirit the result of which is not known. And for Duchamp it is exactly in this unexpected that creation lies and the proportion of it is what he calls the " art coefficient ".

« In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfaction, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plane.

The result of this struggle is a difference between the intention and its realization, a difference which the artist is not aware of.

Consequently, in the chain of reactions accompanying the creative act, a link is missing.

This gap, representing the inability of the artist to express fully his intention, this difference between what he intended to realize and did realize, is the personal 'art coefficient' contained in the work. »⁵⁹

Marcel Duchamp's statement does not seem to me to contradict what every creator could say about creation and it corresponds totally to the process described by Ehrenzweig who moreover devotes to him several pages⁶⁰, insisting on the fact that his work appeals in « a new kind of cooperation between the artist and his public ». But if modernity, still more than before, directs creation to an « open work », to resume the term invented by Umberto Eco⁶¹, the nature of its process at the artist has probably never changed. Is not any work open, up to a point, because the spectator sees it through his personal prism of determinations by projecting his subjectivity into it?

Duchamp stopped more or less any artistic production in 1923, because he was afraid that the game would be over. He says it very clearly :

« [...] The idea was to change; not to repeat myself, [...] It is a repetition of the same thing long enough to become taste. If you refuse to imitate yourself, I mean after you have done something, then it stays as a thing by itself. But if it is repeated a number of times it becomes a taste, a style, if you want.»⁶²

⁵⁹ Duchamp, « Le processus créatif », in *Op. cit.*, p. 188-189.

⁶⁰ Ehrenzweig, *Op. cit.* p. 137-139.

⁶¹ Umberto Eco, *The open work*, Harvard University Press, 1989.

⁶² Duchamp, *Ibid.* p. 178-181 An interview with James Johnson Sweeney published in *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, vol. XIII, n° 4-5, New York, pp.19-21. and nicely entitled "Wisdom". The title of the glass could be translated in *The Bride stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even.*

Maybe, more simply, when has been expressed by the artist what had to be, the inner need is achieved and there is no longer any necessity to do it. Either, we still could imagine another interpretation : Would calculation, speculation, control have taken too much space in Duchamp's process and moved him away from an immediate and sensitive contact, far from innocence that is necessary to creation. In the same interview Duchamp says to Sweeney, about his *Grand Verre*, « *La mariée mise à nue par les célibataires même* », his master-work :

« All the *glass* was imagined and was drawn in 1913 and 1914 on paper. It was based on a perspective view, meaning complete control of the placement of things. It couldn't be haphazard or changed afterwards. It had to go through according to plan, so to speak. ».

Having carried this project so exactly defined during ten years, we can also imagine that Duchamp was a prisoner of his calculations. Picasso could be opposed who said :

« I think that the work of art is the product of calculations, but often without its author knowing it. Exactly as the carrier pigeon, which calculates how to join its nest. But this calculation which happens to be right, is unknown by him; it is a calculation prior to intelligence. »⁶³

In quite a different context, it could be what happened to certain conceptual artists whose work ends up to be too much preconceived (and sometimes slightly boring). It might as well have concerned some members of the French group *Supports-Surfaces*. Very involved in politics and resolutely turning their back on an idealistic and neoromantic conception, they wanted, as it was said at that time, to « demystify » painting, to call into question its constituents⁶⁴. Louis Cane's large and beautiful *Ground-Wall* canvasses (1970), for example, would question, as a reference, the painting and its hanging on the wall, Dezeuze's *Frame* (1967), stretching a plastic sheet, would intent to « denounce » the tension of the subjectile, Viallat's repeated pattern was meant as a refusal of the anecdotal... But, with regard to what came later for some of them, one could wonder whether they did not kill the goose that laid the golden eggs. Such a « questioning » was in fact too much of an « answering » and perhaps did it break the spell.⁶⁵

CONSTRAINTS, RULES, SYSTEM

If creation is a game, as seen above, it raises the question of the rules. Rosalind Krauss says that Duchamp was strongly influenced by Raymond Roussel, fascinating character and fantastically wealthy dandy living in a kind of caravan which he had made fit out luxuriously. In 1911, with Apollinaire, Francis Picabia and his wife, Duchamp attends a performance of Roussel's *Impressions of Africa*, in which are staged art-making machines : for painting, music, tapestry...

In his text intitled *How I wrote some of my books*, published only in 1935, after his likely suicide, Roussel gives the process of his which he thinks can be beneficial to the « writers of the future » Without getting into details, let us say that it consists in issuing two almost identical sentences the

⁶³ Picasso, *Op. cit.*, p. 135. (t. b. a.)

⁶⁴ The title of their first exhibition in Le Havre Art Museum in 1969 was *La peinture en question*.

⁶⁵ Leaving an exhibition of BMPT (Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni), an artistic movement related to Supports/Surfaces in its declaratory practice of painting , Duchamp himself had however declared: « For a frustrating happening, one could not put it better ! ». Quoted by Catherine Millet, *L'art contemporain en France*, Paris, Flammarion, 1988, p. 25.

words of which are with a double meaning, and in using the one at the beginning, and the other at the end.

« Both sentences being found, it was a question of writing a tale which can begin with the first one and finish with second. Thus it was from the resolution of this problem that I drew all my materials. »⁶⁶

Rosalind Krauss sees there the very principle of Duchampian creation : the ready-made is like the result of the machines in *Impressions d'Afrique* and Duchamp has been transformed into a kind of mechanical switch activating the impersonal production process of art. Thus, for her, to be an artist just becomes speculative activity in setting questions.⁶⁷

It seems to me that this type of interpretation totally misses what constitutes the pith and marrow of a creation process. It is a typical « retrospective » point of view, as explained above which reduces the work to a linear route and inevitably flattens the bundle of its complexity. It is even an almost hagiographical vision of the art history, whereas one might consider that the work of Duchamp is as much a success as a failure. The technical procedure does not make the artistic process. Roussel is quite clear on this matter :

« This procedure, as a matter of fact, is similar to the rhyme. In both cases an unforeseen creation happens due to phonetic combinations. It is essentially a poetic procedure. Still it is necessary to know how to use it. And as well as with rhymes you can make good or bad verses, you can with such a procedure make good and bad works. »⁶⁸

Contrary to the game which is indeterminate, the rules are strict. Their aim is to fix, to constraint, to close. But paradoxically to define an open space, it is necessary to bound it. To acknowledge a movement, a fixed point is required. And to play, you need rules.

The thing is not new. Roussel reminds it. Poets always have utilized the rhyme. Issuing a word you just have to find the rhyme. It is like hopscotch ; you throw the pebble and it marks the place to which you have to skip. There is also the metrics: the number of feet which dictates the length of the verse to be made. The rhythmic brings it to complexity, in Latin verses for instance with dactyls and spondees... This has always been codified in versification rules. Above that, there still is the search for assonances and alliterations. Of course you can free yourselves from all that. You can even, like Baudelaire, make *Little poems in prose*. It might be still more difficult. Imagine how upsetting it would be to manage a whole sentimental life led only by free love. French poet Louis Aragon was not very keen on « the hideous comb with broken teeth of the free verse » and he defended the rhyme, « initiator of new things in the ancient and high language which in itself is its own purpose and which we name poetry.⁶⁹ »

⁶⁶ Raymond Roussel, *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*, Paris, UGE, coll. « 10/18 », 1977, p. 12. (t. b. a.).

⁶⁷ Rosalind Krauss, *Passages – Une histoire de la sculpture de Rodin à Smithson*, (french translation), Paris, Macula, 1997, p. 79. Another caricatural example of the dogmatic interpretation of Krauss is her exegesis of a rather typical french and parisian spoonerism: " L'aspirant habite Javel " (The officer cadet lives in Javel = a metro station in Paris) et moi, j'avais la bite en spirale » (and I had the cock in spiral) » in which she sees the most literal aspect of the circular shape which Duchamp confers to the artistic experience !

⁶⁸ Roussel, *Op. cit.* p. 23. (t. b. a.).

⁶⁹ Louis Aragon, *La rime en 1940*, dans *Le Crève-cœur*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Poésie », 1980, p. 61-71. (t. b. a.).

The rhyme is thus a « machine » to make poetry and even to make something new out of something old. Victor Hugo uses it and abuses it sometimes, not hesitating, for instance, to invent the city name of « Jerimadeth » to arrange a required rhyme.⁷⁰

Parallel is obvious with the drawings of the same Victor Hugo. The « blot method » is not new. English painter Alexander Cozens had even formalized it as a teaching method of drawing in the previous century, though the one of « Entlightments » ! Two hundred years before Leonardo recommended it to young painters if lacking inspiration

“I will not forget to insert into these rules, a new theoretical invention for knowledge’s sake, which, although it seems of little import and good for a laugh, is nonetheless, of great utility in bringing out the creativity in some of these inventions. This is the case if you cast your glance on any walls dirty with such stains or walls made up of rock formations of different types. If you have to invent some scenes, you will be able to discover them there in diverse forms, in diverse landscapes, adorned with mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, extensive plains, valleys, and hills. You can even see different battle scenes and movements made up of unusual figures, faces with strange expressions, and myriad things which you can transform into a complete and proper form constituting part of similar walls and rocks. These are like the sound of bells, in whose tolling, you hear names and words that your imagination conjures up.»⁷¹

Max Ernst will « put Leonardo's lesson into practice in a very broad manner » systematizing it as a rubbing procedure in his *Frottages*. It lies on a phenomenon that is no surrealist invention though but it was already utilized by the painters of Lascaux Caves, 15.000 B.C., inspired as they were by the hollows and the bumps of the rock the suggestive shadows of which already imposed to them some image of an animal.

Victor Hugo's blot of coffee or ink directs the poet-draughtsman he is on a graphic track, even if it usually ends in passionate waves or in a Germanic *Burg* at the very top of a sharp mountain, like a Walt Disney castle! Did not he also say that his poetical inspiration came to him more easily when taking a sheet of paper that had been crumpled before by his daughter Léopoldine⁷² ? The page would then become less intimidating and more welcoming to his pen than Stéphane Mallarmé's « void of paper, that whiteness defends »⁷³

Victor Hugo is even said having played it with « holorhymes », that is to say two verses with the same pronunciation but two different meanings. An often attributed to him example is : « Gall,

⁷⁰ Victor Hugo, *La légende des siècles*, « Ruth et Booz », Paris, éd. Gallimard, coll. La Pléiade, 1955, p. 36. The name of the city - Jerimadeth - is unknown in the Bible (and elsewhere). It seems that facetious or impatient Victor Hugo, not quickly enough finding the rhyme with the last verse of his stanza : « ... et Ruth se demandait », resorted to such wits: « J'ai rime à -"dait" » (I have a rhyme with -"dait"). It is moreover significant that the search of the rhyme concerns what comes after and has already been decided on, whereas the poet has not yet found what comes before. It would tend to show that Victor Hugo's process is quite similar to the resolution of a phonetic problem rather than to a search for the meaning of a word which would logically match the previous one. There is more rhyme than reason in it.

⁷¹ Leonardo, *Op. cit.* t. 2, p. 247.

⁷² Victor Hugo, « Et mainte page blanche entre ses mains froissée / Où, je ne sais comment, venaient mes plus doux vers », « Les contemplations », in *Œuvres poétiques*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. La Pléiade, t. 2, 1967, p. 648.

⁷³ Stéphane Mallarmé, « Brise Marine », in *Poésies*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Poésie », 1992, p.22.

amant de la Reine, alla, tour magnanime / Galamment de l'arène à la tour Magne, à Nîmes. » (Gall, the Queen's lover, went, on a magnanimous tour / Gallantly from the Arena to the Magne Tower in Nîmes). Thus, besides the rhyme at the end of the verse, all the feet keep the rhyme, pacing and marching together! And this is still closer to the « rousselian » method, though it might not be of highest poetry !

All this has been since systematized. OULIPO made a method out of it. This « OUvroir de Littérature POTentielle », that one could translate in Laboratory for Potential Literature, is a group of writers around poet Raymond Queneau and mathematician François Le Lionnais, who did set systematic techniques of combinatory writing. The purpose of this method though is not the respect for the rules; it is to make them produce lucky finds. Raymond Queneau's inventiveness in his *Exercices de style*, for example, is due to the fact that the story being told has no interest by itself but by the many various ways it is told. All the intensity of Georges Perec's novel, *La disparition* (The Disappearance), lies in the fact that he exaggeratedly challenged himself to avoid the « e » letter, the most frequent though in french. In 1980, around Le Lionnais, was established a new branch for potential painting, OuPeinPo, OUvroir de PEINTiure POTentielle applying to painting the same sort of procedures.⁷⁴

Musicians too know very well how rules can be beneficial to them : from Beethoven taking as a starting point a rather insipid little waltz of Diabelli to compose his thirty three sublime variations, to the jazzman whose improvisation is sustained by a well defined rhythmic with even obligatory passages.

Often to let themselves be guided the artists settle rules. Any art teacher knows the educational virtues of a constraint : I remember wonderful works of small pupils in a nursery school, who had been asked to express the jubilation of spring which had just arrived only by the means of big sheets of white paper and an enormous can of black paint. Examples are uncountable. English sculptor Tony Cragg refrained to stick, to nail, to screw the elements he uses, whereas his work is a matter of assemblage. Withdrawing from an intentional gesture and skill, french painter Simon Hantaï set himself « the folding as method », plunging his folded canvasses in paint, the work being the result of mechanical operations. Another french artist, François Morellet, expresses very well this attitude :

« For me, a « system », it is a kind of very concise rules of the game which exist before the work and determines exactly its development and thus its execution. I chose this term because it could indicate an attitude I like very much, that of the artists who do not identify with what they are doing [...]. The system allows to decrease the number of subjective decisions and to let the work progress by itself so to speak in front of the spectator. »⁷⁵

The term of system is of course to be understood in the positive sense of a method to find something and not in the pejorative meaning of a mechanical automatism where everything is played beforehand. Not to mention the many artistic means as etching, clay modelling, photography, etc... where the medium itself sets up inescapable technical constraints. One could even think that the more heavy the constraint is, the less we know where it will lead and thus bigger is the part of creation, the « art coefficient », as Duchamp would have said..

⁷⁴ See Thierry Foulc, *Vingt ans de peinture potentielle*, dans le *Magazine littéraire*, n° 398, mai 2001.

⁷⁵ Quoted in the leaflet of his exhibition « François Morellet », In the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris, 2000-2001.

IMPOSSIBILITY AND NECESSITY

Let us tighten up the turn of a screw and put it like that : intensity of all the great things would be proportional to the fruitful tension binding an impossibility with a necessity? It is doubtlessly the secret of the greatest love stories. They are intense because impossible: Tristan and Isolde, Heloise and Abelard, Romeo and Juliet, Charlotte and Werther... The necessity for something comes up against its impossibility. So you cannot use the regular and well known means. You have to invent something else. The inner need enters conflict with the outer need.

If you compare Picasso to Matisse, who possibly are the two greatest painters of the past century, the first one is a child prodigy, « knighted » at the age of twelve by his father, professor in a Fine Arts school though, who decides to stop painting, considering his son's talent. The second is rather clumsy and almost little self-confident. He begins to paint at the age of twenty-five, having been given a watercolour box by his mum while recovering from an operation at the hospital. There is no standard profile for a « great » artist.

Instead of pretending that things are easy, Matisse accepts their difficulty and makes them even still more difficult, by drawing with his pencil fixed at the end of a long, very long stick, for *The dance* (1933) he did for the Barnes Foundation or for his studies for the Vence Chapel (1950). It allows him to survey the whole wall but his gesture is inevitably forced by the weight of the tool. Sometimes he practised the drawing blindfolded. It makes you even less skillful but, as a blind person, you « code » the reality in a different manner. This destabilization allows to approach things in another way. The relationship to the image is quasi-tactile : « haptic ». And a blind man eventually finds his way.

It could remind us of Demosthenes on the beach, with his mouth full of pebbles, training for eloquence, as well as George VI of England, a stammerer too, who had to set his authority as a king... of jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt with his paralyzed two left hand fingers who had to reinvent a technique of virtuoso... This is the general mechanism of overcompensation in a handicap. A long work is necessary to manage to accept the problem and to question it. It is the only attitude that allows to find a solution:

« In art the truth, the reality, begins when you stop understanding anything of what you are doing, and when remains in you an all the stronger energy since it is impeded, compressed, constrained. It is then necessary to appear with the biggest humility, all white and pure, quite artless, the brain seeming empty [...]. But obviously, for that, you need to have all your experience as a background and to have kept the freshness of instinct.»⁷⁶

Sometimes there is too much of an understanding and it gives nothing. The need to trap oneself then becomes pressing, to give oneself the power to understand nothing any longer, to throw a spanner in the works, to make the machine stop and let you go elsewhere. As when Willem De Kooning would draw blindfolded or when, in 1964, he had embodied his *Clam Digger*, the bronze of which can be seen in Pompidou, an almost life-size character modelled in clay, wearing several pairs of rubber gloves over one another, in order to distance himself from the physical contact of the modelling... As when Gaston Chaissac would attach weights to his wrists to hinder his gesture, either by drawing holding his pencil in the mouth...

⁷⁶ Matisse, *Op. cit.*, p. 238 (t. b. a.).

« By playing the harmonium, the idea came to me to draw a picture with my two hands at the same time. I feel that the brain only uses one hand »⁷⁷

On the contrary, at Picasso, there is not the least anxiety at first. He knows how to do everything and dares to do anything, even what he never tried before. Drawing, painting, engraving, etching, cutting, modelling, assembling, pottering...

WIN OR LOSE

« Whether it's a failure or a success, the truth is exactly the same. There's only success in relation to failure. The more it fails, the more it succeeds. » »

I could not locate this famous quote of Giacometti, noted down on a postcard that is tacked on my studio door. Success is thus relative. Picasso says that « one succeeds more or less⁷⁸ ». The criterion of success is anyway difficult to establish. A work which you can very dissatisfied with at the end of day, can appear the next day full of interest. Conversely your day success in the studio can seem very poor the day after, when excitement has fallen off, and can even look so unbearable that you want to destroy it absolutely to remove the kind of shame which it arouses for you, like a cat hides its mess. But one has to be cautious with inconvenient fits of temper, whatever direction they might have. Very often the relevant assessment criterion for the work can only be said after. We cannot judge a current work as we would do for a validated outcome and every stage must only be judged by the capacity which it gives to go on. From this point of view even a recognized failure is a good experience if he allows to understand what has been bad. Picasso puts it even further when he tells Sabartès :

« In museums, for example, there are only failed paintings... You laugh; pay special attention to know if I am right; what we take now for masterpieces, it is what went the furthest from the rules dictated by the masters of the time. The best ones reveal most clearly the stigmas of the artist who painted them. »⁷⁹

It is moreover the true story of the *Young Ladies of Avignon*. This inaugural picture for cubism is rightly considered as the kick-off of modern art at the dawn of the XXth century. It is the jewel of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and, if the Americans lent it for an exhibition in Paris in 1988, it is too precious and will never go out of the United States again. Nonetheless when, after a large number of drawings and exploratory studies, this big picture happens, between May and July 1907, at the « Bateau-Lavoir » in Montmartre, there is general consternation. Picasso's friends, the future masters of the time, pioneers of the painting themselves, feel desperately confused. Georges Braque says that it is as if one was « drinking some oil or eating burning tow ». Derain dreads that Picasso would be found « having hanged himself behind his picture ». Matisse gets angry and speaks of « giving up » on Picasso. The usually enthusiastic critic Félix Fénéon, the art-dealer Ambroise Vollard, the collector Gertrude Stein are distressed and shocked⁸⁰. Leo, the brother of the latter, who had considered two years before Picasso « as a first grade genius and one of the best

⁷⁷ Catalogue of the exhibition « Chaissac », Musée des Sables-d'Olonne, 1991 (t. b. a.).

⁷⁸ Picasso, *Op. cit.* p. 174 (t. b. a.).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 166 (t. b. a.).

⁸⁰ See the catalogue of the exhibition « Les demoiselles d'Avignon » curated by Hélène Seckel, Musée Picasso, Paris, RMN, 1988.

alive draughtsmen », even talks about an « abominable formless waste ». A few years later, André Salmon, to whom the title of the picture is due writes :

« The regular visitors at this curious studio in Ravignan street trusted the young master and they were generally disappointed when he allowed them to judge the first state of its new work [...]. It is the hideousness of the faces that froze those half-converts with dismay. »⁸¹

Nevertheless the picture seems to have moved with the painter through his various studios, still stretched on its frame. In 1916 it is shown in a confidential exhibition organized by Salmon at the fashion designer Paul Poiret's. In 1918 when Picasso settles down with Olga, in a *bourgeois* flat of the fashionable La Boétie street and the canvas is then unstretched and rolled in a corner of the studio. In 1921 André Breton and Aragon will be the middlemen for its purchase by the dressmaker Jacques Doucet. The review *La Révolution surréaliste* will publish in 1925 its first photographic reproduction which will make it known. But it is only in 1937, after having been sold by Doucet's widow to the Seligmann Gallery that it will be really shown, in New York, and in 1939 definitively acquired by the MOMA which will have to part from a picture of Degas to finance such an operation.

In spite of his legendary self-confidence, we cannot think that Picasso was not a little shaken himself by all this story and, if he had not been able to convince his closest companions of the validity of this painting, it may be because he was not totally sure himself. Because contrary to the incomprehension which responded to the impressionists, the hostility did not come from conservative circles but from what we could call the artistic *avant-garde* of the moment. Let us note finally that thirty years of the stay in limbo for this immense painting will have been much longer than the ten or fifteen years of purgatory we make so much case of which for the impressionism.

THE END

In French the word *réussir* (to succeed) comes from Italian *ri-uscire*, which initially only means that an exit has been found. This relativization of success, or at least its uncertainty for the artist, in real time, while working, raises the question of the end. About official painters who were blaming him for not finishing his paintings, Whistler had this scathing repartee :

« Their works may be finished but they have certainly not been started. . »⁸²

The most important is at first that there is some substance, that the work « kneads » a problem. But what is thus a finished work? Same Whistler proposes an interesting criterion:

« A picture is finished when all trace of the means used to bring about the end has disappeared. »⁸³

We could say that this disappearance of all trace of the means corresponds to the withdrawal of all what the artist had put in it too deliberate. Moreover Braque echoes him, who says that « The picture

⁸¹ Quoted by Pierre Daix, *La vie de peintre de Pablo Picasso*, Paris, Le Seuil , 1977, p. 90 (t. b. a.).

⁸² Cité par Patrick Chaleysin, dans *James Mc Neill Whistler, le Cri strident du papillon*, Bournemouth, Parkstone, 1995, p.141.

⁸³ *ibid.* p. 144.

is finished when it has erased the idea⁸⁴ ». Exaggerating it we could almost say that the work is finished when it is not finished, when the artist was able to give up the purpose and the end expected at first. For Whistler it is moreover also the criterion of success :

« A work can only be successful if all trace of effort has disappeared ».⁸⁵

Thus logically it is necessary to aim at this incompleteness. The German painter Emil Schumacher said :

« A painting is never finished. It must not be finished. Any finished painting is also finished in the worst sense of the word. »⁸⁶

And Picasso again :

« I go very slowly. I do not want to spoil the first freshness of my work... If it were possible for me, I would leave it as it is, even if it means beginning again and bringing it to a more advanced state on another canvas. Then I would act the same with this one... There would never be a « finished » canvas, but various « states » of the same picture which usually disappear during the work... Do not finish or execute have moreover a double meaning? To end, to finish, but also to kill, to give the deathblow ? »⁸⁷

Perhaps could we just say that a work is « finished enough » when something material and perceptible has embodied something that will happen to be intelligible. But it occurs often in a kind of spontaneity, it comes along with a certain disorder. And that makes difficult to know, to understand what it is.

HOW TO BE AN ARTIST THEN ?

To this question I have been trying to reply for over thirty years. As an artist myself first, but not in the sense of an acknowledgement as an artist, in the way George Dickie⁸⁸ approaches it on an almost sociological perspective. For him the one who is involved in creation applies to recognition. He is a candidate artist and it is the Art Circle that decides to confer him (or not) this recognition. In my personal case it would not give much because I am a world wide unknown artist. Nevertheless artistic creation is central in my existence. Thus the answer which I try to bring to this question is on the other face, on the « poetic » side. I try to know what characterizes an artistic attitude and process? And this, regardless of the fact that it is recognized (or not).

For that I take support on my personal artistic experience – from what else could I start ? – and on my teaching practice, to try to accompany young people building their own artistic process but also developing themselves as persons. The educational dimension of this teaching is quite central.

⁸⁴ Braque, « Le jour et la nuit », in *Cahiers 1917-1952*, Paris, Gallimard, 1952, p. 27.

⁸⁵ Chaleyssin, *Op. cit.* p. 37.

⁸⁶ Exhibition Emil Schumacher, Paris, Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, 1997.

⁸⁷ Picasso *Op. cit.* p. 108.

⁸⁸ George Dickie, *The Art Circle, A Theory of Art*, New York, Haven Publications, 1984.

Some general principles have been given here, but there are just general principles. There are so many ways to be an artist. You cannot really teach it. Everyone has to find his way and art teaching is almost trying to give our students the conditions that could make their creation possible. Of course there are little tricks that could facilitate it but if they can help « creativity », it has little to do with « creation ».

In the many interviews I made with artists⁸⁹ they all say that, even if they received an art education, it is not in their school that they have learned to be artists. There is always a claim of self-education. At school they found a milieu of other artists. They may have been introduced to the « Art Circle ». But it is by themselves, on their own, that they have become artists. To teach art is thus a very personalized concern, trying to bring every singular student to become aware of what is happening, and beyond major principles as those which are expressed in this chapter, it is very difficult to give recipes which would surely work, because as Jean Dubuffet puts it : « Real art is always where you don't wait for it⁹⁰. » And to teach art is far from an exact science. Matisse had great admiration for his professor, the french symbolist painter Gustave Moreau, who had directed at him criticism, that he was on the way to oversimplify and destroy painting... and had come to him after saying : « Do not listen to me. What you are doing is more important than what I tell you. I am only a professor, I understand nothing. »⁹¹

WHAT COULD A RESEARCH IN CREATION BE ?

From 2009 to 2012, I participated to CREAPRO, a research program the aim of which was to try to compare the creative processes in various field (art, digital composing, scenario writing, design, engineering). To begin with I was quite interested in such a comparison but very soon I realized that the methodology of this project did not fit with what I was trying to approach. If the methodology could work (more or less) for other subjects than mine, it was absolutely unadapted to art where there is no bill of specifications imposed to the artist who does not « execute » his work. Most of the time, even when commissioned, the artist has not to provide something precisely defined at first. The frame of creation is much more open for an artist than for a designer, a scenario writer and still more than for an engineer.

Initiated by a team of researcher in behaviourist psychology, the scenario of this project was conceived in three sets. First an inquiry among « experts » was supposed to allow to draw the typical profile of a creator. I supervised interviews with thirty artists and this was probably the most interesting part of the project. We made a book and films out of them. We were in charge of the art part and we conceived an interview grid, from which the other partners draw on. The treatment of those interviews by our partners was then strictly quantitative, measuring the statistic occurrence of the used words with an application called « Tropes ». But the problem is that artists can speak of the same thing in different words or of something different with the same ones and we had tried to make « explicitation interviews »⁹², in other terms, aiming to make the artist say how it really happened, and sometimes even say something he (or she) was not aware him(her-)self of. But above that, such an exploitation of data seemed to us totally irrelevant because creation probably is an

⁸⁹ Ivan Toulouse & Miguel Angel Molina, *Théories de la pratique : Ce qu'en disent les artistes*, Paris, L'Harmattan, coll. « Eurêka », 2012.

⁹⁰ Dubuffet, *Op. cit.* t. 1, p. 201.

⁹¹ Matisse, *Op.cit.*, p. 81 (t. b. a.).

⁹² See Pierre Vermersch, *L'Entretien d'explicitation*, Issy-les-Moulineaux, ESF, 2003.

exacerbated experience of singularity and a strictly statistical study would miss the object the research is deemed to approach. We did not recognize whom we had been interviewing. Something a little like the difference between a racing greyhound and a run over dog on the road.

The second phase consisted in observing « novices » (that is to say students) at work. We had chosen a group of students working on etching which is a very interesting medium to observe a creation process because of the medium that is very technical and because of the many surprises that happen both at etching the plates as at printing. The aim was to see whether the template of the typical creator could be seen among them, making a difference between the more successful ones and the others. I suggested it was perhaps more interesting for the enquiry and for the students to try a self observation. I asked them to hold a diary, (as many artists do) writing week after week how things had went on and comparing it afterwards with what they had first thought and this document was very useful to discuss and to help them to find their own way in creation. Our psychologist partners wanted them to fill a form at the end of each session to define the tasks they had been working at on that day. I made a grid⁹³ for that thinking it could throw light on their process. This could have been quite interesting but, here again, we did not agree with the kind of processing our partners did with the collected informations. Instead of analysing every single case to understand the specific route of each student, case by case, they would add how many had done this or that, calculating percentages... in such a way as the cumulative reckonings would offset to each other. At the end of the semester, this led to nothing that could have been discriminating but it only gave gloomy flatlined diagrams like a dead man's cardiogram. To us the only relevant approach was in case studies, without any guarantee to be really able to make even a typology, and almost avoiding to try to statisticize anything. Just to map different routes!

The third part of the program aimed to concieve a remediation to improve creative abilities of those who had difficulties. After anatomy and pathology, it was the therapeutic concern : something like the search for a medicine to treat a disease. To tell the truth, a long practice of art education has allowed us to sort out two or three principles which always have to be adapted to specific situations and to particular persons, but they can be summarized in a simple precept : to relativize one's conscious will that would inevitably lead to what one already knows ; to let then outer determinations work by themselves and issue other possible combinations which one never would have thought of and among which there shall be much more interesting things to choose. As explained above, the aim thus is to train the students at a mental seesaw between receptiveness and action, the most difficult task not being to make them produce interesting things, but to make them become aware that they are.

Moreover our participation in this research program has been a very instructive experience which permitted us, on the contrary, to define better our positions and to argue things that had seemed obvious to us, but that were in fact only prejudices or just hypothesis. And does not to be a researcher imply a critical attitude on the methods ? It is not the least part of the research. Incidentally the financial support it gave us allowed to organize in parallel colloquiums and exhibitions as well as to undertake an editorial activity. That produced a kind of shortcut : the first phase of the interviews having been published as a book and as a film, was already the third, that of an assistance - for lack of a remedy !- to help in an artistic creation process. I have been often using it with my students since. On top of that it also made possible the purchase of material means such as an etching press, a ceramics kiln, tools and implements which contributed to let our students be guided more by their sensitive experience than by their intentions.

⁹³ See annex.

Put quickly, our criticism at the methodology of this program draws on the specificity of our research topic. An artist is not outside his process, just observing it. He is intimately and emotionally involved in his creation and so is an artist-researcher : he is not only a food critic, he has to be a cook (and tries to be a chef), he is not only a theologian but a prior (possibly a mystic), he is not only a sexologist or a kama sutra technician but a lover. An artist cannot be selected as one would recruit a manager! Though... the other way: if was applied to management the methods and the attitudes of the artists, it would certainly have a very positive effects on the atmosphere at work and everybody would even be much more efficient. Managers should resume the capacity of the artists to let go, to stop wanting to check everything, to trust what is beyond control and just to cope with it, to share decisions⁹⁴... What was called a few decades ago « self-management » (*autogestion* in french) would not it be a more creative and especially a more effective mode of governance? Anyhow, it is what taught us our experience of administrative responsibility at the university and our practice of working teams management.

AS A CONCLUSION

Art education is probably the very paradigm of any education, if at all. An educational work is necessarily individualized and our practice makes us think that there is no miracle solution. It is of course by getting lost that Christopher Columbus discovered America, but it is not enough to get lost to find a New World. It is probably because he was in the grip of despair that Van Gogh was a great painter, but it is not enough to be unfortunate to be a creator... Creation, by definition, presents a character of exception. There might perhaps be better situations or more favorable circumstances well known of the artists; their reading would be of great learning, from Leonardo's notebooks to Matisse's remarks on art, through Delacroix's diary, and without forgetting the uncountable texts of older or contemporary artists - often entitled « Conversation with... ». This is already be an immense corpus to meditate.

The path of a creation is always singular, because to create, it is, every time, to make something appear that had been never heard, never seen before, in such a way anyhow. That is why a statistical study will miss the target it is aiming to reach. It is hardly quantifiable. Contrary to usual statistical studies, you cannot consider as unimportant infinitely minor occurrences because they are precisely the very ones that become efficient. It is a general epistemological problem. Likewise, the possibility of butterflies having wings with the same design and the same color than the leaves of the trees on which they stay, was infinitely improbable in the evolution of species. And nevertheless, they are the only ones who escaped predators, survived and who, then, by the genetics mechanisms, reproduced in a perfect statistical determinism. In the same way, if we can doubtless highlight « creative » features in common to numerous activities, the reproducible character of a creation is nothing less than presumable.

⁹⁴ But should not a manager be someone who just « manages to » do something... ?

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